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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that new technologies, which play significant roles in the process of communication, may solve some problems, but they also tend to create new ones. A discussion of the various problems encountered in Nigeria, where an appreciable penetration of portable video cameras and recorders has given the public more access to, and choice of, media software, is used as an example of the complexities that a new technology may introduce into a system. The effects on the potential audience of the introduction of the more expensive color television rather than continued use of black and white is also discussed. It is pointed out that the broadcast system in Nigeria, as in the Third World generally, is inextricably involved with politics, and that media in Third World countries, including Asia and Africa, are almost always in the direct or indirect service of the government of the day. Such service, it is noted, results in a high percentage of broadcast time being devoted to educational material, and political broadcasts receiving priority over other programs. The broadcasting systems in Asia and South and Central America are briefly described and compared with the systems in Africa, especially in terms of government involvement and control. The political factors operating in the creation of an alternative station in Nigeria are also described. An overview of the world-wide penetration of radio, television, and video recorders in both developed and Third World countries is then provided, and a concluding statement sums up the current situation in Nigeria. (10 references) (CGD)

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NEW TECHNOLOGIES UPSET THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION BALANCE IN THE THIRD WORLD

Paper presented to the
1986 International Television Studies Conference

by

Segun Oduko

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New technologies have always played significant roles in the process of communication. While they solve some problems, they tend to create new ones. They may lead to greater concentration of the resources of production and distribution in a few multinational corporations (Littunen et al. 1980, p. 299), and this may introduce new international relations. The transmission channels of television programmes may change, so also may the ordinary aspects of life: shopping, newspaper reading, education, office work etc. The new problem of life may become what to do with leisure and where to spend it, whether on earth or in space!

Bob Geldof, a British pop star, recently demonstrated McLuhan's dream of an electronic village with his Live Aid programme. It was an all-night, marathon, fundraising musical (13/7/85) campaign which was watched by an estimate of 1,500 million people across several continents linked by satellite. In Britain, 30 million viewers, more than half of the population (59%) tuned into the 16 hours global consert from Wembley (UK) and Philadelphia (USA), and donated more than £13 million to the starving people of Ethiopia (Baker 1985, p.2).

In contrast to the centralizing influence of satellite, portable video cameras and recorders may increase the public's access and choice of media softwares. But the more the public

have freedom to choose their media softwares, the less, it seems, broadcast television's potential for political communication, as shown in the case of Nigeria. Sometime in 1977/78, the spread of video recorders in two Nigerian large cities, Lagos and Ibadan, became a matter of concern to the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). The video recorders were used to watch cassette tapes (mostly foreign drama) of the viewers' choice. To counteract this, so as not to loose its audience, NTA embarked on a vigorous search for foreign programmes. It acquired a good stock, entertained its audience, but ran into debt. By 1979, NTA had accumulated a debt of £140,000 to BBC, London. It was clear that, left to its own desires, the debt would continue to escalate. So, all the BBC organisations (the BBC Enterprises and the BBC Transcription Services) imposed a ban on sales to Nigeria.

Following the ban, NTA gradually reduced the debt, by payments, to £20,000. Consequently, the BBC lifted the ban, but made a priviso that sales would not be effected directly to the NTA. The BBC now sells its products to a Nigeria-based agent who is held responsible for prompt payments[1]. It is up to the agent to look for buyers in Nigeria and to

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1. This information was obtained from an interview (16/7/85) with Dr. Graham Mytton, Head of International Broadcasting and Audience Research, BBC, London.

sell at whatever price he chooses. There is no doubt that, by this arrangement, the NTA will have to pay more to acquire BBC programmes than it previously did. This turn of events illustrates the complexity that a new technology, video recorder, can introduce into a seemingly orderly system.

Broadcasting and Politics

The introduction of colour television has had a similar disquieting effect to that of video recorders in Nigeria. While the 70% of Nigerians who live in the rural areas (Nigerian Plan 1975-80, p.30) neither had reliable electricity supply nor the funds to purchase black-and-white television sets, the nation changed over to the more expensive colour television in 1977. This further restricted the medium to the elite in the urban areas. Inspite of the inability of Nigeria to cope with new technological developments, it established 30 television stations within a period of 25 years (1960-1984). What, we may ask, accounts for this paradox? Politics is the factor. This was documented some ten years ago in a study of broadcasting in Africa by Sydney Head (1974, p.7):

> Broadcasting in Africa is inextricably involved with politics. One-party states, military regimes, and other relatively authoritarian forms of government manipulate the media in general, but

> broadcasting in particular, as conscious instruments of both internal and external policy. Revolutionary movements seeking to free the remaining regions under foreign domination use broadcasting as a weapon of guerilla warfare. Foreign governments broadcast huge amounts of propaganda into Africa from the outside and seek to influence Africa's own internal broadcasting systems from the inside.

A recent study (Oduko, 1985) of the Nigerian system shows that politics still remains the cornerstone of African broadcasting. Most African countries have monolithic broadcasting systems. The structures, economic bases and programmings of most broadcasting systems in Africa are similar. Broadcast facilities are located in capital cities. Television broadcast hours are usually in the evenings with a few hours daytime schools' broadcasts. The fundamental philosophy of programmings is towards "nation building" or national development. Thus, according to Head (1974, pp. 10-11), a high percentage of broadcast time is devoted to "educational and hortatory material, dealing with subjects such as literacy, civics, public health, agricultural commentary and social guidance." Political broadcasts by top government officials and the coverage of the activities of the head of state receive priority over other programmes.

The sources of news to the stations are the national news agencies which subscribe to the major international news agencies, the London-based Visnews Limited and the

various stations' video/film units. Since African societies are multi-cultural, all African broadcasting systems have the problem of polylingualism. In 1974, according to Head, about 40% to 60% of television programming was imported from the West. A recent study of Nigeria (Ogbo 1985) shows that 54% of the drama programmes originated from the West, and this indicates that the local production/import ratio has not changed since the past ten years. Apart from drama, other locally-produced programmes are news, education, public affairs, discussions, studio games, sports, variety (i.e. dance, mime and songs) and religious matters.

The same political factor found in African broadcasting systems is present in the systems of all the Third World countries generally. Katz and Wedell (1977, p.vii) describe the Third World media thus:

> The mass media in developing countries have gradually abandoned the element of autonomy from government control which was explicit in most models of broadcasting structure transferred from the West. Almost without exception, the media are by now in direct or indirect service of the government of the day. There is not much room for dissent, however constructive, in the broadcasting services of developing countries. Ironically there is not much room, either, for the inherited cultural values of the society.

The broadcasting systems in Asian countries are similar to those of Africa in that they are government-controlled and operated. The exceptions are the Philippines, Indonesia,

South Korea, Lebanon and Thailand where some broadcasting stations are operated on a commercial basis alongside the national government broadcasting services. According to Katz and Wedell (1977, p.43), "The key difference between broadcasting structures in Asia and those in Africa is rooted in the history of the colonial relationships and in the nature of Asian culture and society."

Broadcasting in South and Central America is completely different from that of Africa and Asia in the number of stations, ownership and economic bases. There are more radio and television stations in South America than in the United States (Katz and Wedell 1977, p.44). Majority of the stations are privately-owned and operated commercially. It is only in the former British colonial territories, such as the Caribbean islands, that the African/Asian pattern predominates.

One of Nigeria's television stations, LTV Channel 8, owes its birth in 1980 to the reintroduction of overt politics, after a period of military administration, in 1979 and the subsequent formation of a Lagos State Government by a political party in opposition to the party in power in the Federal Government. Lateef Jakande (1980), the then Governor of Lagos State, argues the case for an alternative station to NTA Channel 10 thus:

> In the past few months, a lot of nonsence has been said and written about the control of television in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We are told that continued control of television by the Federal Government is desirable for the unity and stability of the nation. We are told that such a control is necessary because the Federal Government deserves to have a medium for reaching the masses of our people. We are told that the cost of establishing and maintaining a television station is too expensive for State Governments who should use their limited resources for more important matters like schools and hospitals. I am distressed that among those who peddle this nonsense are professional journalists who certainly know better.
>
> Let me say without equivocation that it is professional heresay for any journalist to advocate the centralization of control of television or any other medium in the hands of one government. For such a monopoly is directly antithetic to the principles of press freedom. Whether it is newspapers, periodicals, radio or television, diversity of control and ownership is a necessary condition for press freedom. The best government in the world should not be allowed to monopolize the control of the mass media or any section of it.

The need for diversified media channels is further advocated by Ugboajah (1980, p.39):

> Government should regard the mass media systems of the states as complementary, not competitive, to the central media system. Tensions can be better managed in the Nigerian society not by creating a monolithic mass media system but by encouraging media variety to give cartharsis to the often charged atmosphere of its multi-ethnic constituencies, especially during periods of conflict.

LTV was established in a hurry, in temporary premises, as part of the Lagos State Broadcasting Corporation.

Its Director and Controller of Programmes were formerly staff members of NTA Channel 10 which was established in 1962. Most of LTV's junior staff were similarly attracted from the same NTA. LTV started operations without the approval of the Federal Government, so it had problems with importing equipment, and for a time, NTA jammed it.

The Federal Government had directed that state television stations would only be allowed to broadcast on the UHF band. But the directive was seen as an attempt to prevent states from operating independent stations because at the time, the television sets available in Nigeria could only receive VHF signals. It was believed that the Federal Government wanted to maintain political advantage over the states through the monopoly of television broadcasting. So, LTV resorted to broadcasting on VHF. Without formally banning LTV, the Federal Government used NTA to jam the broadcast signals of LTV. This infuriated LTV's fans. The Lagos State Government and some other states applied pressure on the Federal Government to permit state broadcasts on VHF. Eventually, LTV was permitted to broadcast on VHF with limited area of coverage and for a period of one year.

Thus LTV started with a large studio built entirely with local materials. The studio was used for news, discussion and variety programmes. It lacked proper studio lights which made it inadequate for drama production. The station had a permanent staff of less than 100. Inspite of its severe handicap, LTV started by featuring a vigorous programme particularly using Yoruba, the indigenous Lagos language, in order to wrest a large share of the Lagos audience from NTA. In 1983, LTV stepped up the audience ratings battle by embarking on non-stop weekend broadcasts using mainly drama programmes. It called its weekend drama LWT (Lagos Weekend Television). This was the Controller of Programme's response to his station's low ratings. The service featured drama with a heavy dose of violence and succeeded in raising the station's audience rating.

The LTV's Controller had earlier observed that Chinese films from Hong Kong and Japan were popular in Nigerian cinema theatres even though the languages of the films were unintelligible to the Nigerian audience. The attraction of the films was Chinese martial art. Since the cost of renting the films was well within the slim budget of LTV, the Controller saw nothing wrong in using Chinese films to pull crowds to his station. Thus, LTV started to show

Chinese films. This led to the public's desertion of cinema theatres for free exciting television shows at home. Cinema theatre proprietors quickly felt a drastic loss of revenue and attributed it to LTV's programming innovation. They then approached LTV's Controller and appealed to him to stop showing Chinese films in order to save their business from collapse. But before LTV's Controller had a chance to reconsider the issue, NTA entered the business of weekend drama with its Marathon TV in July, 1983. It then became clear to all concerned that the war for audience, whether in fiction or in reality, was just beginning (see Figure 1).

The practice of non-stop weekend broadcasts started on a small scale during the national general elections in 1979 when only NTA existed in Lagos. However, it was LTV that formalised the practice in 1983, some months before another elections, in order to sway audiences away from its older competitor, NTA. LTV adopted this strategy to prepare audiences for political broadcasts about the national general election results which were often announced late in the night. Another reason advanced for the practice was that LTV wanted to entertain its fans who had to stay home at weekends because of a ban[1] on night social parties

1. The ban on night parties held outdoors was imposed for security reasons -thieves chased by the police often disappeared among crowds at outdoor parties.

FIGURE 1

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17 days of Marathon TV Vs 87 days of Lagos Weekend TV

—Who is fooling or copying whom?

THE last time these two giants clashed in a title fight was in 1980. At stake then was the battle to win the minds of men, or to control the conscience of viewers. That "Encounter '80" which featured the Federal Government represented by NTA and Lagos State Government contesting for the LTV was for TV frequency allocation.

The story is still fresh and one which reinforces the saying that when two elephants fight, it's the ground that suffers. The tax payers monies melted in that attempt to jam a TV station just as huge resources petered off in order to fence off the show of might not to own a station.

But this time around, the contest is a non-title one yet something is at stake, same thing as before — the viewer. He, like the wiser, eventually decides who wins. Fortunately, unlike before, it's he who benefits in this latest brush of the two "lumbers and caterpillers."

When the Lagos State Television, Channel 8 decided on May 6, 1983 to launch a weekend TV service, it had in mind to compensate Lagos residents who were forced indoors as a result of the ban on night parties and to relax the tension and frustration which the city generates by its industrial and commercial character.

According to the Controller of Programmes, LTV, Mr Jimi Odumosu, LWT programmes serve as escapism to get away from the world of worries, of tensions and problems in Lagos. This is because in the Lagos TV market the audience is more sophisticated, thus harder to satisfy, harder to fool and easier to bore.

These considerations prompted LTV in April, 1981 to introduce for the first time in Nigeria a weekly and regular morning TV viewing on LTV 8 christened "A.M. on LTV". We are told that today NTA, OGTV, TSOS, OSTV and BTV all have adopted the morning TV programming under one title or the other.

This must have been the origin of the Weekend TV concept in LTV but we are presented here with the latest innovation in entertainment and leisure — Lagos Weekend TV (LWT) and Marathon Television (MTS).

The MTS started transmission on July 15, using Channel 10 which is picked in Lagos, Ogun, parts of Oyo and Ondo states. After three weeks of coming into being, I, like many other viewers felt like asking the questions : who is copying who; or is it who is fooling who?; but more importantly, how are these two organs of entertainment run? Nobody would like to believe that there is a political undertone involved in these two ventures. We would rather like to believe that he two are simply competing for viewership. The Sunday Concord spoke to the Operations Manager of LWT, Mr Peter Igoh and the Director of MTS, Mr Alhmi Bello to observe a transition.

The NTA says it was never a reaction to LTV that they started LWT nor was it a hurried project instead that it took a careful planning and a management decision to start the service. But some staff of the authority confessed that the debut of MTS took everybody in the station by surprise. One of them said that the idea was simply to win back viewers which the NTA had lost to LTV. Both stations have the

If you like make you run relay race — make una no block una sef sha!

used for airing some of these theatre and home video film types, Mr. Peter Igoh replied that both media performed differently and have different objectives. "If cinema houses feel we are winning their customers, they should strive to obtain better films than the ones we show".

Expressing the same view, Mr. Alhmi said that there can be question of litigation against us because with an annual vote of ₦200,000 on films alone the station bought from such accredited suppliers as Thommy Brothers, Kano, Four Reels at Ibadan, Onomass in London, Alfred Haber in USA and ITC in London.

He said that such high quality films which they procured make them pace setters in the show business. "We first showed in 1980-81 the British comedy series "Many Wives of Patrick", "Hammer House of Horror" which the NTA started showing in 1982 when we had dropped them. I accused the LWT of showing as a filler an X-rated film "I love Ivy" in the early hours of Saturday, July 16, but the Director headed it off and rather claimed that it might have been another station. "I detest TV violence and sex on personal and professional principles and so cannot encourage it on the screen."

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held outdoors. Considering that adverts were not aired during the late night hours, there was no commercial justification for the broadcasts.

A direct consequence of the use of bizarre foreign films to wage a ratings battle was the denial of time for Nigerian programmes. At a meeting of NTA producers, it was agreed that for effective competition with LTV, some of NTA's Nigerian programmes should be replaced with more exciting foreign films. NTA had no choice, it was emphasized, otherwise it would lose its audience. A free-lance scriptwriter interviewed criticised the all-night broadcasts for not increasing the volume of local drama productions. He alleged that the few Nigerian programmes featured were mostly reruns. The long hours of broadcast by the two stations were filled with foreign programmes. Marathon TV had 63% foreign programmes in the July-September quarter, 1983. But Marathon TV did not survive the "race". After only eight months of operation, in February/March 1984, it collapsed. A little over a year later, whether by a stroke of ill-fortune or by human design, LTV's studio was destroyed by fire. So ended the all-night dramas which were motivated by competition for audiences to receive political messages.

In the mean time, the price of video recorders have skyrocketed owing to the general lock of foreign exchange to import foreign goods. Thus, the spread of video recorders became stunted. As at December 1984, Nigeria had about 1,260,000 video recorders (Screen Digest 1985). Table 1 shows that Nigeria is one of the few Third World countries with an appreciable penetration of video recorders.

World-wide Penetration of Radio, TV and Video Recorders

Data obtained from the BBC's World Radio & Television Receivers, June 1985, show that all known countries of the world have radio broadcasting or listeners. Bhutan, in Asia, with a population of 1.4 million, has the least penetration of radio sets with 1%.

It has no TV set and no video recorder, as shown on Table 2. Nepal, another Asian country with a high population of 16.1 million, neither has television nor video recorder. Considering their two population figures, it is probable that religion and economic situations of the countries could have contributed to their low level of exposure to the electronic media. The most populous country in the world, China, has one of the lowest penetrations of radio 10%, TV 3% and video recorder very low. India, inspite of its

being a nuclear power and inspite of its well-known experiment in the use of satellite and television in education, has penetrations of only 0.3% TV and 15.9% video recorder. This means that relatively few people in China and India have access to the television medium.

Nigeria has had television for 25 years, but amazingly two of her neighbours, Cameroun and Chad have no television, as shown on Table 2. Just as party politics has been a strong factor in Nigerian society, it has been the same in Cameroun and Chad. As such, one would expect that politics would have stimulated the establishment of television in Cameroun and Chad as it did in Nigeria. Probably, not having Nigeria's large population and not having Nigeria's oil wealth are variables that may explain the difference in electronic media penetration.

The United Kingdom ranks third (after Japan and Hong Kong) in video recorder penetration. As in most other countries, video recorders are used at home for two main purposes: (1) time-shifting, whereby broadcast programmes are recorded for delayed viewing, and (2) viewing feature films on pre-recorded cassettes. These two uses have various effects (complementary and/or competitive) on cinema theatres, broadcasting and cable television. On the surface, it

TABLE 1

ESTIMATES OF RADIO, TV AND VIDEO RECORDERS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES AT DECEMBER 1984*

Country	Radio Sets	TV Sets	Video Recorders % of TV Households	Population '000s
USA	213%	72%	25%	235,000
Sweden	120%	57%	22.6%	8,350
UK	95%	47%	37.4%	54,480
Japan	83%	58%	48.4%	120,000
Denmark	78%	49%	17.6%	5,150
Norway	72%	42%	21.7%	4,140
Hong Kong	61%	28%	39.5%	5,300
USSR	36%	31%	-	274,400
Nigeria	17%	7%	20%	90,000
Ghana	16%	1%	-	12,250
Ivory Coast	11%	5%	-	8,750
Chinese People's Rep.	10%	3%	-	1,030,000
India	6%	0.3%	15.9%	725,000
Chad	3%	-	-	4,800
Nepal	3%	-	-	16,100
Bhutan	1%	-	-	1,350

*The data for this table were obtained as follows:

1. radio, TV and population figures from World Radio and Television Receivers, June 1985, BBC London;
2. Video recorder figures from Screen Digest, June 1985, London. Screen Digest did not consider its figures to be accurate because it relied on trade estimates and not the official statistics which were not available.

TABLE 2

A SAMPLE OF COUNTRIES WITHOUT TV BROADCASTING AT DECEMBER 1984*, IN DESCENDING ORDER OF POPULATION ESTIMATES

COUNTRY	REGION	POPULATION
Nepal	Asia & The Far East	16,100,000
Cameroun	Africa	8,850,000
Malawi	"	6,650,000
Rwanda	"	5,750,000
Chad	"	4,800,000
Burundi	"	4,600,000
Papua New Guinea	Australia & Other Ocean Territories	3,300,000
Mauritania	Africa	1,800,000
Lesotho	"	1,450,000
Bhutan	Asia & The Far East	1,350,000
Guyana	West Indies	900,000
Guinea Bissau	Africa	820,000
Gambia	"	710,000
Fiji	Australia & Other Ocean Territories	680,000
Comoro Islands	Africa	390,000
Cape Verde Rep.	"	320,000
Solomon Islands	Australia & Other Ocean Territories	250,000
Vanuatu	"	125,000
Tonga	"	100,000
Sao Tome & Principe	Africa	90,000
Kiribati	Australia & Other Ocean Territories	60,000
Cook & Niue Islands	"	21,000
Nauru Island	"	8,000
Tuvalu	"	8,000

(Table 2 Cont.)

COUNTRY	REGION	POPULATION
Turks & Caicos Islands	West Indies	8,000
St. Helena, Ascension & Tristan da Cunha	Australia & Other Ocean Territories	6,000
Falkland Islands	Latin America	2,000

*The data for this table were obtained from World Radio and Television Receivers, June 1985, BBC London.

appears that video recorders draw audiences away from the other visual media. In fact, it may also do the opposite. In the United States, the cinema audience is generally made up of young people between the ages 16 and 24. Video recorders, therefore, enable cinema films to reach the older set of people who mostly stay at home. This is why some new feature films in America are now released simultaneously on film and video cassette. From the point of view of the audience, time-shifting is complementary to broadcasting and cable television. It enhances the potential of programmes to reach a large audience. While this is good for broadcasting institutions which provide free viewing in the hope of having exposure to their advertisements, it is bad for pay-cable channels which charge fees for viewing.

Where video recorders are used predominantly for watching feature films, as in Nigeria, they are competitive with broadcasting stations in that they reduce the size of the audience for broadcast programmes. Apart from that, the increase in distribution opportunities for feature films may force broadcast stations to pay higher prices for the films they screen.

Producers, on the other hand, stand to gain as well as loose from the spread of VCR use. Competition between video recorders and other visual media increases outlets for their products, and so their sales bargainning power is enhanced. At the same time, video recorders make film piracy much easier than before. In a country like Nigeria, where producers have a limited market and where the law on copyright infringement is not rigidly enforced, the effect of organised piracy and illegal home taping could have a disastrous impact on new production. So, what viewers gain from having an alternative medium and from cheaper viewing costs has, in the case of Nigeria, to be balanced against the possible reduction of choice resulting from the financial squeeze on indigenous film-making. It is expected that when another new technology, DSB (Direct Satellite Broadcasting), is introduced into the Nigerian setting, it will further complicate an already complicated communication system.

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